



State of Play: The Movement to Ban Child Marriage in the United States

September 2025 Update

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Overview

In August 2017, the Tahirih Justice Center (Tahirih) released the first comprehensive analysis of marriage-age provisions in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. that leave children more vulnerable to forced and early marriage. That report, [*Falling through the Cracks: How Laws Allow Child Marriage to Happen in Today's America*](#), provided state lawmakers and advocates in the United States with a first of its kind resource to support their work to pass laws that more effectively protect children from forced marriage in the United States.

Since then, significant progress has been made. But while 36 U.S. states, three territories, and Washington, D.C. have enacted legislation to end or limit child marriage in recent years, some states with the worst laws have yet to take action. Many states that have made progress did not go far enough and will need to strengthen their laws to ban child marriage entirely in future legislative sessions.

At a Glance:

- **16 states, 2 territories, and Washington D.C. set the age floor at the age of majority – generally 18 - without exceptions:** American Samoa, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, U.S. Virgin Islands, Virginia, and Washington.
- **5 more states limit marriage to legal adults** by providing exceptions only for emancipated minors: Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Texas.
- 13 states and one territory require all minors to get judicial approval before they can marry.
- In 10 states and 2 territories, clerks alone – without judges – can issue marriage licenses for all minors above the minimum age limit.
- **4 states and 2 territories do not set any age floor** by statute: California, Guam, Mississippi, New Mexico, Northern Mariana Islands, and Oklahoma.
- 2 states set an age floor younger than 16: Hawaii and Kansas, both at 15.
- 4 states and 1 territory still permit pregnancy to lower the minimum marriage age: Arkansas, Guam, Maryland, New Mexico, and Oklahoma.

A compilation, comparative analysis, and scorecards of every jurisdiction's laws can be found at Tahirih.org/childmarriage.

Birth and Growth of the U.S. Movement to End Child Marriage

At the start of Tahirih’s national campaign to end child marriage,¹ data gathered by Tahirih and other advocates indicated that tens of thousands of children had been married in recent years across the U.S. In response, after a 2016 campaign led by Tahirih, Virginia became the first state to limit marriage licenses to legal adults – individuals age 18 or older, with an exception only for 16- and 17-year-olds who had been emancipated by a special court hearing prior to being issued a marriage license. Similar reforms followed in Texas, New York, Kentucky, Ohio, Georgia, and Indiana, all of which limited exceptions to emancipated minors and established meaningful safeguards against forced marriages of children.

A critical milestone was reached in 2018 when Delaware and New Jersey became the first states to ban all marriage under age 18 without exception, and American Samoa became the first territory to do so.² In May 2020, Pennsylvania and Minnesota became the third and fourth states to enact a “brightline” minimum marriage age of 18 and U.S. Virgin Islands became the second territory to do so. These were followed by: Rhode Island and New York in 2021; Massachusetts in 2022; Vermont, Connecticut, and Michigan in 2023; Washington, Virginia, and New Hampshire in 2024; and District of Columbia, Maine, Oregon, and Missouri in 2025.

Timeline of Legislative Reforms:

- 2016: Virginia
- 2017: Connecticut, New York, Texas
- 2018: Arizona, Delaware (18), Florida, Kentucky, Missouri, New Jersey (18), Tennessee, and American Samoa (18)
- 2019: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Georgia, Louisiana, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio, and Utah
- 2020: U.S. Virgin Islands (18), Idaho, Indiana, Maine, Minnesota (18), and Pennsylvania (18)
- 2021: Utah, Rhode Island (18), New York (18), and North Carolina
- 2022: Maryland, Massachusetts (18), and Alaska
- 2023: Wyoming, West Virginia, Vermont (18), Maine, Connecticut (18), and Michigan (18)
- 2024: Washington (18), Virginia (18), and New Hampshire (18)
- 2025: District of Columbia (18), Utah, Maine (18), Oregon (18), and Missouri (18)

New York's 2021 legislative victory marks a particularly meaningful milestone, as the state passed its brightline 18 law just four years after reforms that, while significant, fell short of ending all marriage under age 18. New York's swift incremental progress towards completely banning child marriage shows what is possible in other states that have made meaningful progress, but not yet banned child marriage.³ Connecticut, Virginia, New Hampshire, Maine, and Missouri have all also followed this model, passing reforms to first limit then ban child marriage.

In total, 36 states, 3 territories, and Washington D.C. have strengthened their marriage-age laws since 2016.⁴ Over that same period, many more states have considered reform bills, and many of those bills have cleared major legislative hurdles, even if they have not yet made it all the way to final passage.

These achievements are all the more remarkable considering that some states see thousands of bills introduced in an intense 40- to 60-day legislative session, all competing for attention and time in committee hearings or chamber floor.

These dynamics were exacerbated by the pandemic which interrupted 2020 legislative sessions and caused serious logistical hurdles throughout 2021, limiting the bandwidth of legislators to take on this and other critical issues while addressing pressing concerns such as pandemic relief, police reform, and voting rights.

Since 2021, more attention has been paid to the issue of child marriage again. 2023 and 2024 saw activity increase again, and 2025 saw more jurisdictions pass a ban on child marriage than any previous year.

Public education has played a critical role in every legislative campaign. Many legislators and advocates simply have no idea that their states' laws are so lax, or that child marriage really happens in America. They often have not considered the stunning inconsistencies between marriage-age laws and statutory-rape laws,⁵ for example, or the cruel irony of permitting a girl to be married before she has attained the rights and access to resources an adult would have to protect themselves from domestic violence.

The startling revelation in 2017 that over 200,000 children under age 18 were married in the United States between 2000 and 2015,⁶ documented through state marriage license data, drove home the need for states to snap into action. That shocking data revealed an overwhelming majority of minors who were married were girls, most were married to adult men, and many of those men were significantly older. Subsequent research into the scope of child marriage in the U.S. has filled gaps in previous efforts and revealed an even more startling picture – estimating over 300,000 marriages between 2000 and 2018.⁷

Increasing media coverage has also called attention to the horrific experiences of former “child brides” who were abused and exploited under the guise of marriage.⁸ Mounting U.S.-based research, amassed and amplified by Tahirih and other advocates, has provided further evidence of how child marriage drastically undermines girls' health, safety, and welfare. Survivors are increasingly stepping forward as advocates and movement-leaders, inspiring and driving changes in the laws.⁹

Most state lawmakers appreciate the acute concerns raised by permitting children to be married, as evidenced by the burst in bipartisan reforms since 2016.¹⁰ More and more states are adopting provisions that better protect children from forced and early marriage, including: setting floors of age 16 or higher; requiring all minors to obtain judicial approvals; setting more detailed substantive criteria; vetting not only the maturity and capacity of the minor but also the intended spouse and marriage for abuse or coercion; clarifying what a “best interests” inquiry should entail; sending cases to specialized judges; appointing counsel; ensuring that minors are emancipated before marriage; and/or informing minors of their rights and resources available to protect them in case of abuse.

Despite broad recognition of the problem, however, most states still have not pursued the simple, straightforward, and powerful solution that survivors, Tahirih, and other advocates have repeatedly urged: set the minimum legal marriage age at the age of majority – generally 18 – with no exceptions.¹¹

Reflections from 2025: Building Momentum

When Tahirih launched the national campaign in 2015 no state had ended child marriage, and many legislators were reluctant to be the first. Early efforts achieved incremental limits on child marriage that dramatically reduced harm, like in Virginia (2016) and Texas (2017), but struggled to break through to the ultimate goal of banning child marriage entirely.

Limits on child marriage remained far more common than total bans for many years:

- By the end of 2018, only 2 states passed bans on child marriage compared to 9 states which passed laws to merely limit it.
- At the end of 2021, there were 4 more state bans vs. 21 states that passed laws to limit child marriage.

The momentum has now shifted. The number of reforms passed to end child marriage matched the number passed to limit it in 2021 and 2023, and in 2024 the only reforms that passed were complete bans on child marriage. More bans passed in 2025 than any previous year (4), while only one state (Utah) passed a law to limit child marriage.

This suggests an exciting tipping point, with more legislatures committed to banning child marriage entirely rather than just limiting it.

There are likely a few reasons for this shift toward total bans: the issue has become mainstream; most states have already passed a reform; incremental successes have limited harm and built momentum; and positive examples have emboldened legislators.

CHILD MARRIAGE IS NOW A MAINSTREAM ISSUE

In 2015 every state allowed child marriage, and hardly anyone was talking about the issue. Since then, the chorus of voices calling on legislators to end child marriage and raising the profile of the issue has grown steadily. Reporters cover every new campaign, making more people aware of the issue even when those campaigns do not succeed in passing a new law. Tahirih and others have gathered data and published a library of reports, making it easy for anyone interested in this issue to learn more and begin their own advocacy. Most importantly, survivors have gripped the public with their personal stories and determination to put an end to the harms they endured and protect future generations.

People, especially lawmakers, are much more likely to be aware of the harms of child marriage in the United States today than they were back in 2015. The issue is no longer restricted to dedicated policy wonks prone to complexity and jargon; more people see the harms of child marriage and are calling on lawmakers to implement a commonsense solution: ban child marriage, no exceptions.

MOST STATES HAVE GOTTEN STARTED

As we approach 10 years of the campaign to end child marriage, there are only a few states left that have not taken any action on the issue. 36 states, 3 territories, and Washington, D.C. have passed a law to at least limit child marriage. Among those, 16 states, 2 territories, and D.C. banned child marriage entirely. That leaves only 14 states that have yet to successfully pass legislation, but of those 14, almost all have at least introduced a bill that would either limit or ban child marriage.

For the jurisdictions that have already achieved incremental action, there is little appeal to spending more political capital on legislation that falls short of banning child marriage entirely. Committed legislators and advocates should look to finish the job by completely banning child marriage in those states. At this point, a decade on, there simply is not much space left for further incrementalism in states where a first step has already been taken.

INCREMENTAL REFORMS LIMIT HARM & BUILD POWER

There are now 36 states where a coalition to ban child marriage exists and already has enough power to pass some sort of reform, if not a total ban. Some of these coalitions may have accepted harm-reducing compromise legislation as an interim measure, but their goal is to end child marriage entirely and they will likely continue pushing toward that goal.

This has played out in six states already. New York, Connecticut, Virginia, New Hampshire, Maine, and Missouri all passed compromise legislation limiting child marriage early in the national campaign. In each state, the coalitions that worked on the issue kept working, building power and relationships, and have since succeeded in coming back to end child marriage entirely. This path to ultimate victory remains open in the 20 states that have passed limits but

not a ban on child marriage, and many of those legislators and advocates have continued introducing “18, no exceptions” legislation in the years since their initial reform.

As the movement matures, these coalitions continue building power, and more states move to end child marriage entirely, we can expect more of the 20 states that have made partial progress to achieve their ultimate goal.

POSITIVE EXAMPLES EMBOLDEN LEGISLATORS

Being the first person to do something is hard. The same is true for state governments. They prefer to learn from each other’s experiences, both positive and negative, and craft legislation based on what their colleagues in other states have done. Back in 2017 it was hard to convince legislators why their state should be the first to end child marriage, and even in 2020 there were only a handful of examples advocates could point to.

That is not the case anymore: 16 states, 2 territories, and Washington, D.C. have ended child marriage, and most of these did so with broad and bipartisan support. States led by both Republican and Democrat trifectas have banned child marriage, as have states with a mix of major parties in power. Bills have also come from sponsors on both sides of the aisle, and been signed into law by governors that ranged from deeply conservative to deeply liberal and everything in between.

In every region of the country and for lawmakers of any political stripe, there are now plenty of examples of similar states and legislators who have banned child marriage.

In this context of a maturing movement that has built and demonstrated its power over nearly a decade, moving forward, advocates and legislators should be more committed to efforts that end – not just limit – child marriage.

As the list of positive examples continues to grow, and especially as it expands to more regions of the country, it becomes easier to assure lawmakers that ending child marriage is a commonsense solution embraced by many of their colleagues and constituents.

Notable Shifts in Child Marriage Laws¹²

Protective Practices Are Increasing:

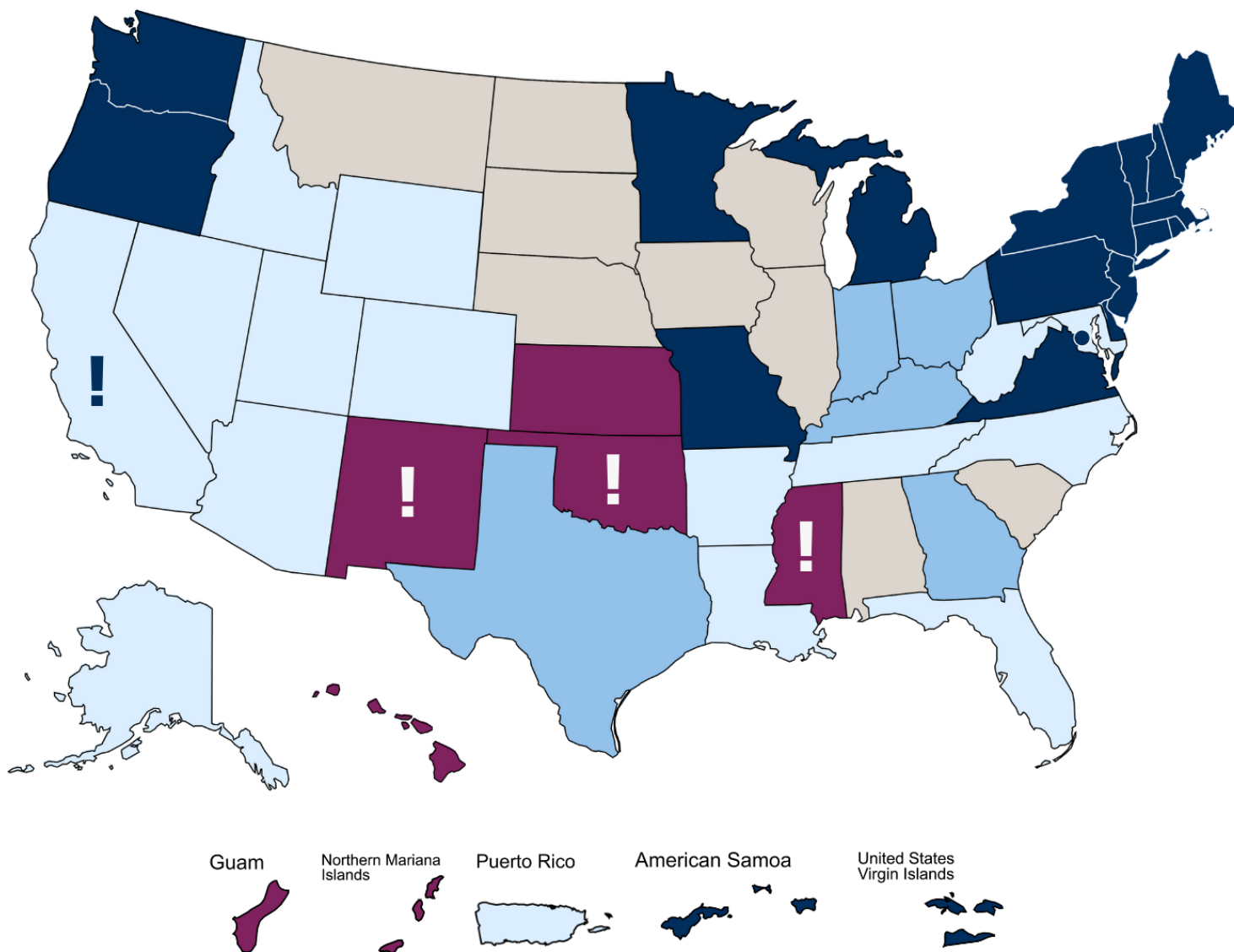
Protective Measures	Laws in 2015	Laws in 2025
Age floor of 18, no exceptions	0	17
Floor of “legal adulthood”	0	22
Age floor of 17	2	8
Age floor of 16	12	20
Maximum age difference between a minor and intended spouse	0	12
All unemancipated minors must get judicial approval to marry	8	13
Minors are appointed counsel for judicial hearings	2	7
Waiting period is required before issuing a minor a marriage license	2	8
Judges approving underage marriages must consider the minor’s best interests	17	18
Parental consent does not prove a marriage is in the minor’s best interests	0	3
Pregnancy does not prove a marriage is in the minor’s best interests	6	8
Judges must consider the minor’s maturity/capacity	6	14
Judges must consider whether the marriage is voluntary	6	13
Judges must consider criminal records, protection orders, and/or a history of abuse	2	5
Minors are given information on the rights, responsibilities, and resources available to parties to a marriage and/or emancipated minors, and to victims of domestic violence	0	5

Harmful Practices Are Decreasing:

Harmful Measures	Laws in 2015	Laws in 2025
No age floor	28	4
Low age floor, below age 16	9	2
Different exceptions based on gender, leaving girls more vulnerable	5	1
Pregnancy exception can drop the legal age to marry	10	4
Older minors can marry with only parental consent	41	21
Judges receive little or no guidance	29	8
Judges need not specialize in family law or juvenile matters	30	17

Legislative Reforms to Limit or Ban Child Marriage Since 2016

Updated September 2025



14 states have yet to adopt any reforms.

Among those, the “worst offenders” are states with:

- ▶ No age floor + pregnancy exception → NM, OK
- ▶ No age floor + different rules for girls vs boys → MS

- Reforms banned marriage under the age of majority, generally 18
- Reforms limited marriage to legal adults (age 18, or court-emancipated minors)
- Reforms limited child marriage by setting/raising age floors, setting maximum age differences, and/or instituting or strengthening judicial review
- No reforms to existing laws, which allow marriage at age 16 and older
- No reforms to existing laws, which allow marriage below age 16
- ! No age floor – if statutory criteria are met, there is no limit on how young a child can be married

Going Beyond Age of Marriage

The progress made in changing the laws that govern the issuance of marriage licenses has been hugely impactful. However, additional state and federal legislative reform is needed to prevent the life-long harms that can be caused by child and forced marriage.

For example, child marriages sometimes take place through religious or cultural ceremonies solemnized without a license. Marriages of U.S. children have also happened overseas, after the child has been taken to another country to be married (at times forcibly or through deception). Changing the minimum legal age at which an individual can be civilly married in a U.S. state will not prevent these harms. Additionally, such reforms do not protect children born overseas who are brought to the U.S. as spouses and fiancés of adult U.S. citizens by the thousands.¹³

Minimum marriage age reforms also only address child marriage - marriage under the age of majority. Such reforms do not help adults who are forced or coerced into marriage against their will.¹⁴ Ensuring that civil protection orders are accessible to anyone facing a forced marriage would make a critical difference for both children and adults in all these scenarios. The U.K., in fact, has a specialized “forced marriage protection order” created by statute in 2008 and U.K. courts issued more than 1,800 such orders, to minors and adults, in the first decade of their existence.¹⁵

Civil protection orders could take into account the unique dynamics often present in forced marriage cases, including that the perpetrators of a forced marriage are commonly a victim’s parents or other family members. Many victims, especially minors, are understandably reticent to press criminal charges, but are more willing to consider civil legal options.¹⁶ Yet to date, Texas is the only U.S. state that specifically makes forced marriage a basis for a civil prevention order, and it is limited to the forced marriage of a child.¹⁷ One other state to take a novel civil approach to forced marriage is Tennessee. Legislative amendments enacted in 2018 alongside marriage-age reforms established a new civil cause of action and up to \$250,000 in damages for anyone who, at any age, was forced into a marriage.¹⁸

There is also a role for federal leadership to end child marriage in the U.S. Although the division of authority outlined in the Constitution leaves most family law matters to the states, Congress should enact legislation to incentivize states to strengthen their marriage-age laws. Tahirih’s recommendations for federal action on child marriage are outlined in our report *Time to Lead: The Federal Government’s Role in Ending Child Marriage in the United States*.¹⁹

Previously, we have also called on Congress to clarify that federal funding to serve victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking encompasses victims of forced marriage and to eliminate the “marriage defense” in the federal statutory rape law. Through the 2022 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), we achieved these two momentous policy goals. The law also mandates that the Attorney General’s office will study and report on the disconnect between states’ laws on minimum age of marriage laws and statutory rape.²⁰

Survivor Advocates Show the Way

Courageous and passionate survivor advocates are driving marriage-age reforms across the United States. Woven through their painful personal stories have been many common threads – perpetrating parents, predatory older men, threshold vulnerabilities like poverty and family instability, repeated system-failures to protect them, and a lack of self-help options to protect themselves. These stories have inspired not only a broad investment in change, but also specific safeguards incorporated in reform legislation. It is striking, and appropriate, that in some states laws untouched for decades have been replaced in a single legislative session when legislators have been moved by the stories of survivors.

But sometimes the fast pace of these reforms can have a downside, inclining legislators towards lowest-common-denominator approaches that can more easily garner broad consensus and a quick win. In states where only surface-level reforms have been enacted, we know that despite new laws, old tragedies can easily repeat themselves. This is why campaigners in states where child marriage has not been banned entirely will not stop until it is.

In the next phase of this historic movement, we implore legislators to carefully examine their laws and legislative proposals through survivors' eyes and experiences.

Call to Action

This is an exciting and pivotal moment in the national movement. So much progress has been made, and much work remains to end child marriage in the U.S. completely. We call on every state to set their minimum marriage age at the age of majority – generally 18 – without exception.

For states where incremental progress is the only strategic way forward in the short term, an age floor of 16 should be the firm minimum, and those minors permitted to marry should be court emancipated through a considered and cautious process prior to marriage. For those states that already have, or newly enact, judicial approval alternatives to a minimum marriage age of 18, we expect to see more robust vetting and safeguards built into those proceedings. Finally, we recommend a more holistic approach to the problem – to address the needs of already-married girls, girls and women who face forced marriages that are religious or cultural rather than legal, those who are taken abroad for marriages that happen under the laws of a foreign country rather than a U.S. state, as well as foreign born girls vulnerable to the predations of U.S. men who seek to bring them to our country as brides and fiancés.

To achieve this, the following work is needed at the federal level as well as across all 50 states, 5 territories, and Washington D.C.:

AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

Form bipartisan coalitions to enact thoughtful reforms to marriage-based visa statutes that currently permit children to sponsor/be sponsored on fiancé(e)/spouse visas, leverage the federal government's power to convene key actors, and promote model approaches in order to guide and incentivize reforms at the state level.

FOR THE 16 STATES, 2 TERRITORIES, AND WASHINGTON D.C. THAT HAVE BANNED CHILD MARRIAGE

Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Rhode Island, New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, Michigan, Washington, Virginia, New Hampshire, Oregon, Maine, Missouri, American Samoa, and U.S. Virgin Islands must:

- consider civil options for individuals at risk or survivors of forced marriages, like ensuring access to protection orders or providing for compensatory damages.
- strike any “marriage defense” that shields perpetrators from prosecution for statutory rape.

FOR THE 20 STATES AND 1 TERRITORY THAT HAVE LIMITED, BUT NOT ENDED, CHILD MARRIAGE

The 5 states that have limited marriage to legal adults (Texas, Kentucky, Ohio, Georgia, and Indiana), as well as the 15 states and Puerto Rico whose reforms stopped short of setting the floor at “legal adulthood” must do the above, and:

- closely monitor marriage license data post-reforms to identify any gaps in implementation or the shortcomings of existing safeguards.
- strengthen laws with the ultimate goal of setting the age of majority, without exception, as the minimum marriage age in every state and territory.²¹

FOR THE 14 STATES AND 2 TERRITORIES THAT HAVE NOT YET PASSED ANY REFORM

These 14 states, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands urgently need to enact bills to ban marriage before the age of majority. Among these jurisdictions, the highest priority are:

- those with the highest numbers of children married in recent years, as revealed by marriage license data.²² The top 5 states for child marriage that have not yet passed a reform are Alabama, New Mexico, Illinois, South Carolina, and Mississippi.
- the 4 states and 2 territories that have no age floor: California²³, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Guam, and Northern Mariana Islands.

- the 2 states that have a low age floor (below age 16): Hawaii and Kansas.
- the 4 states and 1 territory that maintain an exception that lowers the age floor in case of pregnancy: Arkansas, Maryland²⁴, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Guam.
- the states & territories in which a judge is never involved.²⁵
- the states & territories in which judges are involved only superficially.²⁶
- *any state or territory that has a toxic combination of the above factors, which puts girls at heightened risk. New Mexico combines the most of these factors (4), followed by Oklahoma and Mississippi (3 each).*

Alongside marriage-age reforms, these jurisdictions also need to:

- strike any “marriage defense” that shields perpetrators from prosecution for statutory rape.
- consider civil options for individuals at risk or survivors of forced marriage, like ensuring access to protection orders or providing for compensatory damages.

These transformative shifts will broadcast a powerful message to survivors, individuals at risk, and the world: the United States is serious about ending child marriage.

¹ The information reflected in this policy brief are up-to-the-minute as of September 30, 2025, and will differ from Tahirih’s *Child Marriage in the U.S.: Survivor Story Compilation* released on January 10, 2020, and from other Tahirih materials at tahirih.org/childmarriage or www.preventforcedmarriage.org with earlier publication dates. All tallies include the laws of all 50 states plus Washington, D.C..

The tally of states that have made progress does not include South Carolina, though a new law relating to marriage-age has been enacted there. On May 13, 2019, South Carolina’s governor signed SB 196 into law, effective upon signature, to clarify that South Carolina has a firm minimum marriage age of 16. The legislation responded to investigative reporting that confirmed that judicial interpretations of prior minimum marriage age statutes had been inconsistent, and that some probate judges were granting marriage licenses in case of pregnancy notwithstanding the fact that a girl was younger than age 16. See Lauren Sausser, “In SC, pregnant girls as young as 12 can marry. There’ve been 7,000 child brides in 20 years” (*The Post and Courier*, June 21, 2018).

As interpreted by the South Carolina Office of the Attorney General, legislative reforms in 1997 had *already* instituted age 16 as the minimum marriage age (see S.C. Office of the Attorney General, 1997 WL 665423 (S.C.A.G. Sept. 2, 1997), available at <http://www.scag.gov/archives/category/opinions/1997opinions>). However, the 1997 reforms did not harmonize all statutory provisions related to marriage age, such as a pregnancy exception to age 18 that was set forth in Section 20-1-300 of the 1976 Code. By definitively repealing Section 20-1-300, South Carolina has made clear that there is a firm age floor of 16, regardless of pregnancy. But because the new law simply clarified what was already the legislature’s intent in enacting earlier reforms, South Carolina is not included in the tallies of the 36 states that have made progress since 2016 to end or limit child marriage.

² In 2018 American Samoa became the first territory to ban child marriage when they raised the minimum marriage age for girls to age 18; the law already set age 18 as the minimum for boys. See [“Governor Signs Marriage Age Bill into Law,” Talane’i](#) (September 11, 2018); Fili Sagapolutele, [“Bill Raising The Marriage Age for Girls Is Signed into Law,” Samoa News](#) (September 12, 2018). On January 18, 2020 the governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands signed Bill #33-0109, which sets age 18 as the minimum marriage age for all, into law; previously, the minimum was age 14 for girls and age 16 for boys. In 2020, Puerto Rico’s Ley 55-2020 overhauled the territory’s civil code, and included a minimum marriage age of 18. This does not end child marriage in the territory, however, as the age of majority is 21.

We have generally kept the laws of U.S. territories separate from those of the states and D.C. throughout our reports on this subject, in recognition of the fact that each territory has a unique history and legal regime that in many cases may differ significantly from the structures of civil law in a state or Washington D.C.. For example, Puerto Rico’s 2020 overhaul of the territory’s civil code left intact much of the structure that is derived from Spanish Common Law rather than the English-derived laws present in most U.S. states. Any serious discussion of reform to U.S. territorial law should be led by advocates, lawmakers, and especially survivors within that territory – as has been the case already for the reforms in American Samoa (2018), U.S. Virgin Islands (2019), and Puerto Rico (2020).

³ In 2021, New York was the first U.S. state to show that incremental progress toward a brightline prohibition on child marriage is possible, followed by Connecticut in 2023, Virginia and New Hampshire in 2024, and Maine and Missouri in 2025.

⁴ Alabama is the only state that has recently *regressed* in its approach to child marriage. [SB 69](#), a bill signed into law on May 31, 2019, abolished across the board, for parties of all ages, the requirement that marriage licenses be issued by probate judges. Previously, a probate judge was at least nominally involved in the process of granting a marriage license for the marriage of a minor, to verify the consent of both parents or guardians of the minor. As of the new law’s effective date on August 29, 2019, the parental consent requirement can be satisfied by only one parent or guardian simply filing an affidavit with the court.

⁵ For more on the contradictions between statutory rape laws and marriage age laws across the United States, see [“The Alarming Disconnect Between Age-Based Sex Offenses and Minimum Marriage Age,” Tahirih Justice Center](#) (August, 2020). See also [“Conflicts between State Marriage Age and Age-Based Sex Offenses,” United States Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women](#) (February, 2024). Note, however, that Tahirih has found this report to contain multiple errors in its interpretation of territorial marriage age statutes, incorrectly stating a minimum marriage age of 16 in both Northern Marianas Islands and Guam, both of which have exceptions that would allow children to marry under this age. We have not fully evaluated the report for other errors, but encourage care when relying on it as a resource. For a more accurate picture of minimum marriage age in U.S. Territories, see “Statutory Text Compilation: Minimum Marriage Age and Exceptions across the United States,” Tahirih Justice Center (Updated 2025) available at www.tahirih.org/childmarriage.

⁶ Anjali Tsui, Dan Nolan, and Chris Amico, [“Child Marriage in America: By the Numbers,” Frontline](#), (July 6, 2017).

⁷ Data compiled in [“Child Marriage in North Carolina: New Evidence and Policy Recommendations,” International Center for Research on Women](#) (August 2020) and [“United States’ Child Marriage Problem,” Unchained at Last](#) (April 2021).

⁸ See, e.g., [“Child Brides Call on U.S. States to End ‘Legal Rape’,” Reuters](#) (October 24, 2018); [“Grown Men Are Exploiting Loopholes in State Laws to Marry Children,” Huffington Post](#) (August 30, 2017).

⁹ For more information on the survivor-advocates leading the campaign to end child marriage, see [“Child Marriage in the U.S.: Survivor Story Compilation,” Tahirih Justice Center](#) (2020).

¹⁰ That said, some states do not yet appear ready to acknowledge the seriousness or urgency of the problem, despite appeals directly from survivors of child marriage as well as by leading advocacy organizations. Many bills have languished post-introduction without a committee hearing or vote, and in other states bills favorably reported out of committee have been defeated in floor votes.

¹¹ To ban child marriage the minimum marriage age must match the age of majority – either age 18 or *higher* in states & territories where the age of majority is higher, as in Alabama and Nebraska where the age of majority is 19 or Mississippi and Puerto Rico where it is 21.

¹² This table includes laws of all 50 states and Washington D.C., but not U.S. territories. Information on territories was first added to these reports’ annual updates in 2025, 10 years after the movement began. Tahirih has not yet found copies of the relevant 2015 statutes in all U.S. territories.

¹³ See “How the U.S. Immigration System Encourages Child Marriages” *available at* <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Child%20Marriage%20staff%20report%201%209%202019%20EMBARGOED.pdf> and the data provided by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services referenced in the report is *available at* <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/USCISdatareport011019.pdf>.

¹⁴ Of note, about one third of the clients of Tahirih’s Forced Marriage Initiative were minors at time of initial contact with our program. The rest are adults, though some are seeking help to leave a marriage they had been forced into while still under the age of 18. Many others reach out to Tahirih after turning 18, but regarding a forced marriage that has been planned since before they were an adult.

¹⁵ See “Family Court Tables,” Table 18, “Applications and disposals of Forced Marriage Protection Orders made in the High Court and county courts, England and Wales, annually 2009 - 2018 and quarterly Q4 2008 - Q4 2018,” *available at* <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-court-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2018>.

¹⁶ See [“National Consultation: Should Forced Marriage Be A Crime in the United States?”](#) (Tahirih Justice Center, 2016). This report reflected on discussions on criminal approaches to forced marriage that Tahirih convened in 2016 among 30 participants, including survivors. While 9 U.S. states have criminal statutes specifically on forced marriage, to Tahirih’s knowledge, no recent prosecutions have been brought under those statutes. Instead, when charges have been brought for a forced marriage, it is because the facts satisfy the elements of another crime, such as rape, abduction, or child endangerment. Prosecutors may, in fact, prefer to bring charges under such other statutes, which do not require proof of the perpetrator’s intent to force someone into a marriage against their will. See also [“Criminal Laws Addressing Forced Marriage in the United States,” available at https://preventforcedmarriage.org/forced-marriage-resource-toolkit-for-service-providers/](#).

¹⁷ Tahirih successfully advocated for these protection order reforms alongside marriage-age reforms enacted in 2017. See [Tex. Fam. Code §261.001\(1\)\(M\)](#) (adding “forcing or coercing a child to enter into a marriage” to the definition of child abuse) and [Tex. Fam. Code §71.004\(2\)](#) (adding forced marriage of a child to the bases for family violence protection orders). In Texas, any adult can petition for a family violence protection order to protect any child from a forced marriage. Some other states have protection order statutes for domestic violence or stalking that are expansive enough to encompass a threatened forced marriage, but in many states, minors are not able to petition for civil protection orders on their own behalf. See Lisa V. Martin, “[Restraining Forced Marriage](#),” *Nevada Law Journal*: Vol. 18: Iss. 3, Article 8 (2018).

¹⁸ See [Tenn. Code Ann. § 36-3-108](#). This section also clarified that forced marriages are void and unenforceable.

¹⁹ See “Time to Lead: The Federal Government’s Role in Ending Child Marriage in the United States,” available at <https://www.tahirih.org/pubs/time-to-lead-the-federal-governments-role-in-ending-child-marriage-in-the-united-states/>.

²⁰ See “Conflicts between State Marriage Age and Age-Based Sex Offenses,” *U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women* (2024) available at <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/reports-congress>. Note, however, that Tahirih has found this report to contain multiple errors in its interpretation of territorial marriage age statutes, incorrectly stating a minimum marriage age of 16 in both Northern Marianas Islands and Guam, both of which have exceptions that would allow children to marry under this age. We have not fully evaluated the report for other errors, but encourage care when relying on it as a resource. For a more accurate picture of minimum marriage age in U.S. Territories, see “Statutory Text Compilation: Age of Marriage and Exceptions across the United States,” available at www.tahirih.org/childmarriage.

²¹ For further specific guidance about the kinds of procedural elements that, working together, can better protect children from forced marriages and other harm, please see the extensive resources available at tahirih.org/childmarriage.

²² See *supra*, n. 6 This article was based on available data at the time but noted that some states do not separately track or publicly report the numbers of minors married. Subsequent efforts to obtain marriage license data by the Tahirih Justice Center in Georgia (on file with Tahirih) and the International Center for Research on Women in North Carolina (International Center for Research on Women, *supra* note 7) have revealed thousands of minors were married in recent years.

²³ California is the only state or territory to pass a reform and still not have a minimum marriage age. We have included them here despite not being one of the 14 states to not pass any reform because of this failure to implement this most basic safeguard for younger minors.

²⁴ Arkansas and Maryland are the only states or territories to pass a reform without removing the pregnancy exception from prior law, and no state has newly implemented a pregnancy exception that didn’t exist prior to reform. For this reason we have included both Arkansas and Maryland on the list of priority states.

²⁵ See “Scorecard 1: Protection Gaps,” *Tahirih Justice Center* (Updated 2025), available at <http://www.tahirih.org/childmarriage> for a full list of states that allow minors to marry without every involving a

judge or in which a judge is only superficially involved.

²⁶ *Ibid.*